

THE
A R T
OF
P O E T R Y,

Written in FRENCH by
MONSIEUR DE BOILEAU
IN FOUR CANTO'S.

TRANSLATED
BY
SIR WILLIAM SOAMES,
Since Revis'd by JOHN DRYDEN, Esq.

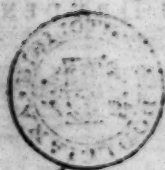
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THE
ART
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POETRY.
CANTO I.

RASH author, 'tis a vain presumptuous crime
To undertake the sacred art of rhyme;
If at thy birth the stars that rul'd thy sense
Shone not with a poetic influence:
In thy strait genius thou wilt still be bound,
Find Phoebus deaf, and Pegasus unsound.

You then, that burn with the desire to try
The dangerous course of charming poetry;
Forbear in fruitless verse to lose your time,
Or take for genius the desire of rhyme:
Fear the allurements of a specious bait,
And well consider your own force and weight.

Nature abounds in wits of every kind,
And for each author can a talent find:
One may in verse describe an amorous flame,
Another sharpen a short epigram:

Waller a hero's mighty acts extol;
 Spenser sing Rosalind in pastoral:
 But authors that themselves too much esteem,
 Lose their own genius, and mistake their theme; 20
 Thus in times past † Dubartas vainly writ,
 Allaying sacred truth with trifling wit,
 Impertinently, and without delight,
 Describ'd the Israelites triumphant flight,
 And following Moses o'er the sandy plain,
 Perish'd with Pharaoh in the Arabian main.

Whate'er you write of pleasant or sublime,
 Always let sense accompany your rhyme:
 Falsely they seem each other to oppose;
 Rhyme must be made with reason's laws to close: 30
 And when to conquer her you bend your force,
 The mind will triumph in the noble course;
 To reason's yoke she quickly will incline,
 Which, far from hurting, renders her divine:
 But, if neglected, will as easily stray, 35
 And master reason, which she should obey.
 Love reason then: and let whate'er you write
 Borrow from her its beauty, force, and light.
 Most writers, mounted on a resty muse,
 Extravagant, and senseless objects chuse; 40
 They think they err, if in their verse they fall
 On any thought that's plain, or natural:

† Dubartas translated by Sylvester.

Fly this excess ; and let Italians be
 Vain authors of false glitt'ring poetry.
 All ought to aim at sense ; but most in vain 48
 Strive the hard pass, and slipp'ry path to gain ;
 You drown, if to the right or left you stray ;
 Reason to go has often but one way.
 Sometimes an author, fond of his own thought,
 Pursues his object till it's over-wrought: 50
 If he describes a house, he shews the face,
 And after walks you round from place to place ;
 Here is a Vista, there the doors unfold,
 Balcone's here are ballustred with gold ;
 Then counts the rounds and ovals in the halls, 55
 “ † The festoons, freezes, and the astragals : ”
 Tir'd with his tedious pomp, away I run,
 And skipt o'er twenty pages to be gone.
 Of such descriptions the vain folly see,
 And shun their barren superfluity. 60
 All that is needless carefully avoid,
 The mind once satisfi'd, is quickly cloy'd :
 He cannot write, who knows not to give o'er,
 To mend one fault, he makes a hundred more :
 A verse was weak, you turn it much too strong, 65
 And grow obscure, for fear you should be long.
 Some are not gaudy, but are flat and dry ;
 Not to be low, another soars too high.

†. Verse of Scudery.

Would you of every one deserve the praise?
 In Writing, vary your discourse and phrase;
 A frozen style, that neither ebs or flows,
 Instead of pleasing, makes us gape and doze.
 Those tedious authors are esteem'd by none
 Who tire us, humming the same heavy tone.
 Happy, who in his verse can gently steer,
 From grave, to light; from pleasant, to severe:
 His works will be admir'd where-ever found,
 And oft with buyers will be compass'd round.
 In all you write, be neither low nor vile:
 The meanest theme may have a proper style.

The dull burlesque appear'd with impudence,
 And pleas'd by novelty, in spite of sense.
 All, except trivial points, grew out of date;
 Parnassus spoke the cant of Billingsgate:
 Boundless and mad, disorder'd rhyme was seen:
 Disguis'd Apollo chang'd to Harlequin.
 This plague, which first in country towns began,
 Cities and kingdoms quickly over-ran;
 The dullest scriblers some admirers found,
 And the * Mock-Tempest was a while renown'd:
 But this low stuff the town at last despis'd,
 And scorn'd the folly that they once had priz'd;
 Distinguish'd dull, from natural and plain,
 And left the villages to Fleckno's reign.

* The Mock-Tempest, a play, written by Mr. Duffet.

Let not so mean a stile your muse debase ;
 But learn from * Butler the buffooning grace :
 And let burlesque in ballads be employ'd ;
 Yet noisy bombast carefully avoid,
 Nor think to raise (tho' on Pharsalia's plain)
 " † Millions of mourning mountains of the slain : " 100
 ‡ Nor, with Dubartas, bridle up the floods,
 And perriwig with wool the bald-pate woods.
 Chuse a just style ; be grave without constraint,
 Great without pride, and lovely without paint :
 Write what your reader may be pleas'd to hear : 105
 And, for the measure, have a careful ear,
 On easy numbers fix your happy choice ;
 Of jarring sounds avoid the odious noise :
 The fullest verse and the most labour'd sense,
 Displease us, if the ear once take offence. 110
 Our ancient verse, (as homely as the times,)
 Was rude, unmeasur'd, only tagg'd with rhymes :
 Number and cadence, that have since been shown,
 To those unpolish'd writers were unknown.
 ** Fairfax was he, who, in that darker age, 115
 By his just rules restrain'd poetic rage :
 Spenser did next in pastorals excel,
 And taught the noble art of writing well :
 To stricter rules the stanza did restrain,
 And found for poetry a richer vein. 120

* Hudibras. † Verse of Brebeuf. ‡ Verse of Dubartas.
 ** Fairfax in his translation of Godfrey of Bullen.

Then D'Avenant came; who, with a new found art,
 Chang'd all, spoil'd all, and had his way apart :
 His haughty muse all others did despise,
 And thought in triumph to bear off the prize,
 Till the sharp-sighted critics of the times
 In their mock-Gondibert expos'd his rhymes ;
 The laurels he pretended did refuse,
 And dash'd the hopes of his aspiring muse.
 This head-strong writer, falling from on high,
 Made following authors take less liberty.
 Waller came last, but was the first whose art
 Just weight and measure did to verse impart ;
 That of a well-plac'd word could teach the force,
 And shew'd for poetry a nobler course :
 His happy genius did our tongue refine, 136
 And easy words with pleasing numbers join :
 His verses to good method did apply,
 And chang'd harsh discord to soft harmony.
 All own'd his laws ; which, long approv'd and try'd,
 To present authors now may be a guide. 140
 Tread boldly in his steps, secure from fear,
 And be, like him, in your expressions clear.
 If in your verse you drag, and sense delay,
 My patience tires, my fancy goes astray,
 And from your vain discourse I turn my mind, 145
 Nor search an author troublesome to find.
 There is a kind of writer pleas'd with sound,
 Whose fustian head with clouds is compass'd round,

No reason can disperse 'em with its light :
 Learn then to think, e'er you pretend to write, 115
 As your idea's clear, or else obscure,
 Th' expression follows perfect, or impure :
 What we conceive, with ease we can express ;
 Words to the notions flow with readiness.

Observe the language well in all you write, 115
 And swerve not from it in your loftiest flight.
 The smoothest verse, and the exactest sense
 Displease us, if ill English give offence :
 A barb'rous phrase no reader can approve ;
 Nor bombast, noise, or affectation love. 116
 In short, without pure language, what you write,
 Can never yield us profit, or delight.
 Take time for thinking ; never work in haste ;
 And value not yourself for writing fast.
 A rapid poem, with such fury writ, 116
 Shews want of judgment, not abounding wit.
 More pleas'd we are to see a river lead
 His gentle streams along a flow'ry mead,
 Than from high banks to hear loud torrents roar, 117
 With foamy waters on a muddy shore.
 Gently make haste, of labour not afraid ;
 A hundred times consider what you've said :
 Polish, repolish, every colour lay,
 And sometimes add ; but oft'ner take away.
 'Tis not enough, when swarming faults are writ, 117
 That here and there are scatter'd sparks of wit ;

Each object must be fix'd in the due place,
And diff'ring parts have corresponding grace:

Till by a curious art dispos'd we find
One perfect whole, of all the pieces join'd.

Keep to your subject close, in all you say;
Nor for a sounding sentence ever stray.

The public censure for your writings fear,
And to yourself be critick most severe.

Fantastic wits their darling follies love;

But find you faithful friends that will reprove,

That on your works may look with careful eyes,

And of your faults be zealous enemies:

Lay by an author's pride and vanity,

And from a friend a flatterer descry,

Who seems to like, but means not what he says:

Embrace true counsel, but suspect false praise.

A sycophant will every thing admire;

Each verse, each sentence sets his soul on fire:

All is divine! there's not a word amiss!

He shakes with joy, and weeps with tenderness;

He over-pow'rs you with his mighty praise.

Truth never moves in those impetuous ways:

A faithful friend is careful of your fame,

And freely will your heedless errors blame;

He cannot pardon a neglected line,

But verse to rule and order will confine,

Reproves of words the too affected noise;

Here the sense flags and repetition cloy:

Your fancy tires and your discourse grows vain, 210
 Your terms improper; make them just and plain.
 Thus 'tis a faithful friend will freedom use;
 But authors, (partial to their darling muse,)
 Think to protect it they have just pretence,
 And at your friendly counsel take offence. 215
 Said you of this, that the expression's flat?
 Your servant, Sir; you must excuse me that,
 He answers you. This word has here no grace,
 Pray leave it out: that, Sir, 's the proper'st place.
 This turn I like not: 'tis approv'd by all. 220
 Thus, resolute not from a fault to fall,
 If there's a syllable of which you doubt,
 'Tis a sure reason not to blot it out.
 Yet still he says you may his faults confute,
 And over him your pow'r is absolute: 225
 But of his feign'd humility take heed;
 'Tis a bait laid to make you hear him read:
 And when he leaves you, happy in his muse,
 Restless he runs some other to abuse.
 And often finds; for in our scribbling times
 No fool can want a sot to praise his rhymes: 230
 The flattest work has ever, in the court,
 Met with some zealous Ass for its support:
 And in all times a forward, scribbling fop
 Has found some greater fool to cry him up.

CANTO II.

PASTORAL.)

AS a fair nymph, when rising from her bed,
With sparkling diamonds dresses not her
head;

But, without gold, or pearl, or costly scents,
Gathers from neighb'ring fields her ornaments;
Such, lovely in its dress, but plain withal,
Ought to appear a perfect Pastoral:
Its humble method nothing has of fierce,
But hates the ratling of a lofty verse:
There, native beauty pleases, and excites,
And never with harsh sounds the ear affrights.
But in this stile a poet often spent,
In rage throws by his * rural instrument;
And vainly, (when disorder'd thoughts abound,)
Amidst the eclogue makes the trumpet sound:
Pan flies, alarm'd, into the neighbouring woods,
And frightened Naiads dive into the floods.
Oppos'd to this another, low in stile,
Makes shepherds speak a language base and vile;
His writings, flat and heavy, without sound,
Kissing the earth, and creeping on the ground;

* Flute-pipe.

OF POETRY.

13

You'd swear that Randal, in his rustick strains,
 Again was quav'ring to the country swains,
 And changing, without care of sound or dress,
 Strephon and Phillis, into Tom and Bess.
 'Twixt these extremes 'tis hard to keep the right;
 For guides take Virgil, and read Theocrite:
 Be their just writings, by the gods inspir'd,
 Your constant pattern, practis'd and admir'd.
 By them alone you'll eas'ly comprehend
 How poets, without shame, may condescend
 To sing of gardens, fields, of flow'rs, and fruit,
 To stir up shepherds, and to tune the flute,
 Of love's reward to tell the happy hour,
 Daphne a tree, Narcissus made a flow'r,
 And by what means the eclogue yet has pow'r
 * To make the woods worthy a conqueror:
 This of their writings is the grace and flight;
 Their risings lofty, yet not out of sight.

E L E G Y.

The Elegy, that loves a mournful stile,
 With unbound hair weeps at a funeral pile,
 It paints the lovers torments, and delights,
 A mistress flatters, threatens, and invites:
 But well these raptures if you'll make us see,
 You must know love, as well as poetry.

* Virg. Eclog. iv.

I hate those lukewarm authors, whose forc'd fire
 In a cold style describes a hot desire,
 That sigh by rule, and raging in cold blood
 Their sluggish muse whip to an amorous mood:
 Their feign'd transports appear but flat and vain:
 They always sigh, and always hug their chain,
 Adore their prison, and their suff'rings bless,
 Make sense and reason quarrel as they please.
 'Twas not of old in this affected tone
 That smooth Tibullus made his amorous moan;
 Nor Ovid, when, instructed from above,
 By nature's rules he taught the art of love.
 The heart in elegies forms the discourse.

O D E.

The ode is bolder, and has greater force.
 Mounting to heav'n in her ambitious flight,
 Amongst the gods and heroes takes delight;
 Of Pisa's wrestlers tells the sin'ewy force,
 And sings the dusty conqueror's glorious course:
 To Simois streams does fierce Achilles bring,
 And makes the Ganges bow to Britain's king.
 Sometimes she flies, like an industrious bee,
 And robs the flow'rs by nature's chymistry,
 Describes the shepherds dances, feasts, and blifs,
 And boasts from Phyllis to surprize a kiss,
 When gently she resists with feign'd remorse,
 That what she grants may seem to be by force:

Her generous stile at random oft will part,
 And by a brave disorder shows her art.
 Unlike those fearful poets, whose cold rhyme
 In all their raptures keep exactest time,
 That sing th' illustrious hero's mighty praise 75
 (Learn writers !) by the terms of weeks and days ;
 And dare not from least circumstances part,
 But take all towns by strictest rules of art :
 Apollo drives those fops from his abode ;
 And some have said, that once the humorous god 80
 Resolving all such scriblers to confound
 For the short sonnet order'd this strict bound :
 Set rules for the just measure, and the time,
 The easy running, and alternate rhyme ;
 But, above all, those licences deny'd 85
 Which in these writings the lame sense supply'd ;
 Forbad an useless line should find a place,
 Or a repeated word appear with grace.
 A faultless sonnet, finish'd thus, would be
 Worth tedious volumes of loose poetry. 90
 A hundred scribbling authors, without ground
 Believe they have this only phoenix found :
 When yet th' exactest scarce have two or three
 Amongst whole tomes, from faults and censure free.
 The rest, but little read, regarded less, 95
 Are shovel'd to the pastry from the press.
 Closing the sense within the measur'd time,
 'Tis hard to fit the reason to the rhyme.

EPIGRAM.

The Epigram, with little art compos'd,
 Is one good sentence in a distich clos'd.
 These points, that by Italians first were priz'd,
 Our antient authors knew not, or despis'd:
 The vulgar, dazled with their glaring light,
 To their false pleasures quickly they invite;
 But public favour so increas'd their pride,
 They over-whelm'd Parnassus with their tide.
 The madrigal at first was overcome,
 And the proud sonnet fell by the same doom;
 With these grave Tragedy adorn'd her flights,
 And mournful Elegy her funeral rites:
 A hero never fail'd 'em on the stage,
 Without his point a lover durst not rage;
 The amorous shepherds took more care to prove
 True to their point, than faithful to their love.
 Each word, like Janus, had a double face:
 And prose, as well as verse allow'd it place:
 The lawyer with conceit, adorn'd his speech,
 The parson without quibbling could not preach,
 At last affronted reason look'd about,
 And from all serious matters shut 'em out:
 Declar'd that none should use 'em without shame,
 Except a scattering in the Epigram;
 Provided that, by art, and in due time
 They turn'd upon the thought, and not the rhyme.

Thus in all parts disorders did abate;
 Yet quiblers in the court had leave to prate:
 Insipid jesters, and unpleasant fools,
 A corporation of dull punning drolls.
 'Tis not, but that sometimes a dextrous muse
 May with advantage a turn'd sense abuse,
 And, on a word, may trifle with address;
 But above all avoid the fond excess,
 And think not, when your verse and sense are lame,
 With a dull point to tag your Epigram.

Each Poem his perfection has a part;
 The British Round in plainness shows his art;
 The Ballad, tho' the pride of antient time,
 Has often nothing but his humorous rhyme;
 The † Madrigal my softer passions move,
 And breath the tender ecstasies of love:

S A T Y R.

Desire to show itself, and not to wrong
 Arm'd virtue first with Satyr in its tongue,
 Lucilius was the man who bravely bold,
 To Roman vices did this mirror hold,
 Protected humble goodness from reproach,
 Show'd worth on foot and rascals in the coach:
 Horace his pleasing wit to this did add,
 And none uncensur'd could be fool or mad;

† An old way of writing, which began and ended with
 the same measure.

Unhappy was that wretch, whose name might be
Squar'd to the rules of their sharp poetry.
Persius, obscure, but full of sense and wit,
Affected brevity in all he writ!
And Juvenal, learn'd as those times could be,
Too far did stretch his sharp hyperbole;
Tho' horrid truths through all his labour shine,
In what he writes there's something of divine;
Whether he blames the Caprean debauch,
Or of Sejanus fall tells the approach,
Or that he makes the trembling senate come
To the stern tyrant, to receive their doom;
Or Roman vice in coarsest habit shews,
And paints an empress reeking from the stews:
In all he writes appears a noble fire;
To follow such a master then desire.
Chaucer alone, (fix'd on the solid base,)
In his old style, conserves a modern grace:
Too happy, if the freedom of his rhymes
Offended not the method of our times.
The Latin writers, decency neglect;
But modern readers challenge our respect,
And at immodest writings take offence,
If clean expression cover not the sense.
I love sharp Satyr, from obsceneness free;
Not impudence, that preaches modesty:
Our English, who in malice never fail,
Hence, in lampoons and libels, learnt to rail;

Pleasant detraction, that by singing goes
 From mouth to mouth, and as it marches grows!
 Our freedom in our poetry we see,
 That child of joy, begot by liberty.

But, vain blasphemer, tremble, when you chuse
 God for the subject of your impious muse:
 At last, those jests which libertines invent
 Bring the lewd author to just punishment,
 Ev'n in a song there must be art, and sense;
 Yet sometimes we have seen, that wine, or chance
 Have warm'd cold brains, and given dull writers
 mettle,

And furnish'd out a scene for Mr. S. :
 But for one lucky hit, that made thee please,
 Let not thy folly grow to a disease,
 Nor think thyself a wit; for in our age
 If a warm fancy does some sop engage;
 He neither eats or sleeps, 'till he has writ,
 But plagues the world with his adulterate wit.
 Nay, 'tis a wonder, if, in his dire rage,
 He prints not his dull follies for the stage;
 And, in the front of all his senseless plays,
 Makes David Logan crown his head with bays.

• D. Logan a Graver.

C A N O N I C A L

TRAGEDY.

THERE'S not a monster bred beneath the sky
 But, well dispos'd by art, may please the eye:
 A curious workman, by his skill divine,
 From an ill object makes a good design.
 Thus, to delight us, Tragedy, in tears
 For * Oedipus, provokes our hopes, and fears:
 For parricide Orestes asks relief;
 And to encrease our pleasure, causes grief.
 You then, that in this noble art would rise,
 Come; and in lofty verse dispute the prize.
 Would you upon the stage acquire renown,
 And for your judges summon all the town?
 Would you your works for ever should remain,
 And, after ages past, be sought again?
 In all you write, observe with care and art
 To move the passions, and incline the heart.
 If, in a labour'd act, the pleasing rage
 Cannot our hopes and fears by turns engage,
 Nor in our mind a feeling pity raise;
 In vain with learned scenes you fill your plays:
 Your cold discourse can never move the mind
 Of a stern critic, nat'rally unkind;

* Writ by Mr. Dryden.

Who, justly tir'd with your pedantic flight,
 Or falls asleep, or censures all you write.
 The secret is, attention first to gain;
 To move our minds, and then to entertain:
 That, from the very opening of the scenes,
 The first may show us what the author means.
 I'm tir'd to see an actor on the stage
 That knows not whether he's to laugh, or rage;
 Who, an intrigue unravelling in vain,
 Instead of pleasing, keeps my mind in pain:
 I'd rather much the haucous duncce should say
 Downright, my name is Hector in the play;
 Than with a mass of miracles, ill join'd,
 Confound my ears, and not instruct my mind;
 The subject's never soon enough exprest;
 Your place of action must be fix'd, and rest.
 A Spanish poet may, with good event,
 In one day's space whole ages represent;
 There oft the hero of a wandring stage
 Begins a child, and ends the play of age:
 But we, that are by reason's rules confin'd,
 Will, that with art the poem be design'd,
 That unity of action, time, and place
 Keep the stage full, and all our labours grace.
 Write not what cannot be with ease conceiv'd;
 Some truths may be too strong to be believ'd.
 A foolish wonder cannot entertain:
 My mind's not mov'd, if your discourse be vain.

You may relate, what would offend the eye :
 Seeing, indeed, would better satisfy ;
 But there are objects, that a curious art
 Hides from the eyes, yet offers to the heart.
 The mind is most agreeably surpriz'd,
 When a well-woven subject, long disguis'd,
 You on a sudden artfully unfold,
 And give the whole another face, and mold.
 • At first the Tragedy was void of art ;
 A song ; where each man danc'd, and sung his part, 6
 And of god Bacchus roaring out the praise
 Sought a good vintage for their jolly days :
 Then wine, and joy, were seen in each man's eyes,
 And a fat goat was the best singer's prize.
 Thespis was first, who, all besmear'd with lee,
 Began this pleasure for posterity :
 And with his carted actors, and a song,
 Amus'd the people as he pass'd along.
 Next, Aeschylus the diff'rent persons plac'd,
 And, with a better masque his players grac'd : 7
 Upon a theatre his verse express'd,
 And show'd his hero with a buskin dress'd.
 Then Sophocles, the genius of his age,
 Increas'd the pomp, and beauty of the stage,
 Engag'd the chorus song in every part,
 And polish'd rugged verse by rules of art :

The beginning and progress of Tragedies.

He, in the Greek, did those perfections gain,
 Which the weak Latin never could attain;
 Our pious fathers, in their priest-ridden age,
 As impious, and profane, abhor'd the stage:
 A troop of silly pilgrims, as 'tis said,
 Foolishly zealous, scandalously play'd
 (Instead of heroes, and of love's complaints)
 The angels, god, the virgin, and the saints.
 At last, right reason did his laws reveal,
 And show'd the folly of their ill-plac'd zeal,
 Silenc'd those nonconformists of the age,
 And rais'd the lawful heroes of the stage:
 Only th' Athenian masque was lay'd aside,
 And chorus by the music was supply'd.
 Ingenious love, inventive in new arts,
 Mingled in plays, and quickly touch'd our hearts:
 This passion never could resistance find,
 But knows the shortest passage to the mind.
 Paint then, I'm pleas'd my hero be in love;
 But let him not like a tame shepherd move:
 Let not Achilles be like Thyrsis seen,
 Or for a Cyrus show an Artamen;
 That, struggling oft, his passion's we may find,
 The frailty, not the virtue of his mind.
 Of romance heroes shun the low design;
 Yet to great hearts some human frailties join:

* Artamen, the name of Cyrus in Scuderie's romance.

Achilles must with Homer's heat engage;
 For an affront I'm pleas'd to see him rage:
 Those little failings in your hero's heart
 Show that of man and nature he has part:
 To leave known rules you cannot be allow'd;
 Make Agamemnon covetous, and proud,
 Aeneas in religious rites austere,
 Keep to each man his proper character.
 Of countries and of times the humours know;
 From diff'rent climates, diff'rent customs grow:
 And strive to shun their fault, who vainly dress
 An antique hero like some modern ass;
 Who make old Romans like our English move,
 Show Cato sparkish, or make Brutus love.
 In a romance those errors are excus'd:
 There 'tis enough that, reading, we're amus'd:
 Rules too severe would then be useless found;
 But the strict scene must have a juster bound:
 Exact decorum we must always find.
 If then you form some hero in your mind,
 Be sure your image with itself agree;
 For what he first appears, he still must be.
 Affected wits will nat'rally incline
 To paint their figures by their own design:
 Your bully poets, bully heroes write;
 Chapman, in Buffy D'Ambois took delight,
 And thought perfection was to huff, and fight.

Wise nature by variety does please ;
 Cloath diff'ring passions in a diff'ring dress :
 Bold anger, in rough haughty words appears,
 Sorrow is humble, and dissolves in tears.

Make not your • Hecuba with fury rage,
 And show a ranting grief upon the stage ;
 Or tell in vain how the rough Tanais bore
 His seven-fold waters to the Euxine shore :
 These swoln expressions, this affected noise
 Shows like some pedant, that declaims to boys.
 In sorrow, you must foster methods keep ;
 And, to excite our tears, yourself must weep :
 Those noisy words with which ill plays abound,
 Come not from hearts that are in sadness drown'd.

The theatre for a young poet's Rhymes

Is a bold venture in our knowing times :
 An author cannot eas'ly purchase fame ;
 Critics are always apt to hiss, and blame :
 You may be judg'd by every ass in town,
 The privilege is bought for half a crown.
 To please, you must a hundred changes try ;
 Sometimes be humble, then must soar on high :
 In noble thoughts must every where abound,
 Be easy, pleasant, solid, and profound :
 To these you must surprising touches join,
 And shew us a new wonder in each line ;

• Seneca trag.

D

That in a just method well design'd,
 May leave a strong impression in the mind,
 These are the arts that Tragedy maintain:

THE EPIC.

But the Heroic claims a loftier strain.
 In the narration of some great design,
 Invention, Art, and Fable all must join :
 Here Fiction must employ its utmost grace ;
 All must assume a body, mind, and face :
 Each Virtue a divinity is seen ;
 Prudence is Pallas, Beauty Paphos queen.
 'Tis not a cloud from whence swift lightning fly ;
 But Jupiter, that thunders from the sky :
 Nor a rough storm, that gives the sailor pain ;
 But angry Neptune, ploughing up the main :
 Echo's no more an empty airy sound ;
 But a fair nymph that weeps her lover drown'd.
 Thus in the endless treasure of his mind,
 The poet does a thousand figures find,
 Around the work his ornaments he pours,
 And strows with lavish hand his op'ning flow'rs.
 'Tis not a wonder if a tempest bore
 The Trojan fleet against the Lybian shore ;
 From faithless Fortune this is no surprise,
 For every day 'tis common to our eyes ;
 But angry Juno, that she might destroy,
 And overwhelm the rest of ruin'd Troy :

That Aeolus with the fierce goddess join'd,
Op'ned the hollow prisons of the wind,
Till angry Neptune, looking o'er the main,
Rebukes the tempest, calms the waves again, 184
Their vessels from the dang'rous quick-sands steers;
These are the springs that move our hopes and fears.
Without these ornaments before our eyes,
Th' unfinew'd poem languishes, and dyes;
Your poet in his art will always fail, 190
And tell you but a dull insipid tale,
In vain have our mistaken authors try'd
These ancient ornaments to lay aside,
Thinking our God, and prophets that he sent,
Might act like those the poets did invent, 195
To fright poor readers in each line with hell,
And talk of Satan, Ashtaroth, and Bel;
The mysteries which Christians must believe,
Disdain such shifting pageants to receive:
The Gospel offers nothing to our thoughts 200
But penitence, or punishment for faults;
And mingling falsehoods with those mysteries,
Would make our sacred truths appear like lyes.
Besides, what pleasure can it be to hear,
The howlings of repining Lucifer, 205
Whose rage at your imagin'd hero flies,
And oft with God himself disputes the prize?
Tasso, you'll say has done it with applause;
It is not here I mean to judge his cause:

Yet, tho' our age has so extoll'd his name,
 His works had never gain'd immortal fame,
 If holy Godfrey in his ecstasies
 Had only conquer'd Satan on his knees;
 If Tancred, and Armida's pleasing form,
 Did not his melancholy theme adorn.
 'Tis not, that Christian poems ought to be
 Fill'd with the fictions of idolatry;
 But in a common subject to reject
 The gods, and heathen ornaments neglect;
 To banish Tritons who the seas invade,
 To take Pan's whistle, or the Fates degrade,
 To hinder Charon in his leaky boat
 To pass the shepherd with the man of note,
 Is with vain scruples to disturb your mind,
 And search perfection you can never find:
 As well they may forbid us to present
 Prudence or justice for an ornament,
 To paint old Janus with his front of brass,
 And take from Time his scythe, his wings and glass,
 And every where, as 'twere idolatry,
 Banish descriptions from our poetry.
 Leave 'em their pious follies to pursue;
 And let our reason such vain fears subdue:
 And let us not, amongst our vanities,
 Of the true God create a god of lyes.
 In fable we a thousand pleasures see,
 And the smooth names seem made for poetry;

As Hector, Alexander, Helen, Phillis,
 Ulysses, Agamemnon and Achilles:
 In such a croud, the poet were to blame 200
 To chuse king Chilperic for his hero's name.
 Sometimes, the name being well or ill apply'd,
 Will the whole fortune of your work decide.
 Would you your reader never should be tir'd?
 Chuse some great hero, fit to be admir'd, 205
 In courage signal, and in virtue bright,
 Let ev'n his very failings give delight;
 Let his great actions our attention bind,
 Like Caesar or like Scipio, frame his mind,
 And not like Oedipus his perjur'd race; 210
 A common conqueror is a theme too base,
 Chuse not your tale of accidents too full;
 Too much variety may make it dull:
 Achilles' rage alone, when wrought with skill,
 Abundantly does a whole Iliad fill. 215
 Be your narrations lively, short, and smart;
 In your descriptions show your noblest art:
 There 'tis your poetry may be employ'd;
 Yet you must trivial accidents avoid.
 Nor imitate that * fool, who, to describe 220
 The wondrous marches of the chosen tribe,
 Plac'd on the sides, to see their armies pass,
 The fishes staring through the liquid glass;

* St. Amant.

Describ'd a child, who with his little hand,
 Pick'd up the shining pebbles from the sand. 265
 Such objects are too mean to stay our sight;
 Allow your work a just and nobler flight.
 Be your beginning plain; and take good heed
 Too soon you mount not on the airy steed:
 Nor tell your reader, in a thund'ring verse, 270
 "• I sing the conqueror of the universe."
 What can an author after this produce?
 The lab'ring mountain must bring forth a mouse.
 Much better are we pleas'd with his † address 275
 Who, without making such vast promises,
 Says, in an easier stile and plainer sense,
 "I sing the combats of that pious prince,
 "Who from the Phrygian coast his armies bore,
 "And landed first on the Lavinian shore.
 His op'ning muse sets not the world on fire, 280
 And yet performs more than we can require:
 Quickly you'll hear him celebrate the fame,
 And future glory of the Roman name;
 Of Styx and Acheron describe the floods,
 And Caesars wandring in th' Elysian woods: 285
 With figures numberless his story grace,
 And every thing in beauteous colours trace.
 At once you may be pleasing and sublime;
 I hate a heavy melancholy Rhyme:

• The first line of Scuderie's *Alaric*. † Virgil's *Eneids*.

I'd rather read Orlando's Comic tale,
 Than a dull author always stiff and stale,
 Who thinks himself dishonour'd in his stile,
 If on his works the Graces do but smile.
 'Tis said, that Homer, matchless in his art,
 Stole Venus' girdle, to ingage the heart:
 His works indeed vast treasures do unfold,
 And whatsoe'er he touches turns to gold:
 All in his hands new beauty does acquire;
 He always pleases and can never tire.
 A happy warmth he every where may boast;
 Nor is he in too long digressions lost:
 His verses without rule a method find,
 And of themselves appear in order join'd;
 All without trouble answers his intent;
 Each syllable is tending to th' event.
 Let his example your endeavours raise:
 To love his writings, is a kind of praise.

A poem, where we all perfections find,
 Is not the work of a fantastick mind:
 There must be care, and time, and skill, and pains;
 Not the first heat of unexperienc'd brains.
 Yet sometimes artless poets, when the rage
 Of a warm fancy does their minds engage,
 Puff'd with vain pride, presume they understand,
 And boldly take the trumpet in their hand;
 Their fustian muse each accident confounds;
 Nor can she fly, but rise by leaps and bounds,

Till their small stock of learning quickly spent,
 Their poem dies for want of nourishment:
 In vain mankind the hot-brain'd fools decry,
 No branding censures can unveil his eyes;
 With impudence the laurel they invade,
 Resolv'd to like the monsters they have made.
 Virgil, compar'd to them is flat and dry;
 And Homer understood not poetry;
 Against their merit if this age rebel,
 To future times for justice they appeal.
 But waiting till mankind shall do 'em right,
 And bring their works triumphantly to light;
 Neglected heaps we in by-corners lay,
 Where they become to worms and moths a prey;
 Forgot, in dust and cobwebs let 'em rest,
 Whilst we return from whence we first digrest.

The great success which Tragic writers found,
 In Athens first the Comedy renown'd,
 Th' abusive Grecian there, by pleasing ways,
 Dispers'd his nat'ral malice in his plays:
 Wisdom, and virtue, honour, wit, and sense,
 Were subject to buffooning insolence:
 Poets were publicly approv'd, and sought,
 That vice extoll'd, and virtue set at nought;
 And Socrates himself, in that loose age,
 Was made the pastime of a scoffing stage.
 At last the public took in hand the cause,
 And cur'd this madness by the pow'r of laws;

Forbad at any time, or any place,
 To name the person, or describe the face.
 The stage its antient fury thus let fall,
 And Comedy diverted without gall :
 By mild reproofs, recover'd minds diseas'd, 350
 And, sparing persons, innocently pleas'd.
 Each one was nicely shown in this new glass,
 And smil'd to think he was not meant the ass,
 A miser oft would laugh the first, to find
 A faithful draught of his own sordid mind ; 355
 And fops were with such care and cunning writ,
 They lik'd the piece for which themselves did sit.
 You then, that would the Comic laurels wear,
 To study nature be your only care :
 Who e'er knows man, and by a curious art 360
 Discerns the hidden secrets of the heart ;
 He who observes, and nat'rally can paint
 The jealous fool, the fawning sycophant,
 A sober wit, an enterprising ass,
 A humorous Otter, or a Hudibras ; 365
 May safely in these noble lists engage,
 And make 'em act and speak upon the stage :
 Strive to be natural in all you write,
 And paint with colours that may please the sight.
 Nature in various figures does abound ; 370
 And in each mind are diff'rent humours found :
 A glance, a touch, discovers to the wise ;
 But every man has not discerning eyes.

All-changing Time does also change the mind;
And diff'rent ages, diff'rent pleasures find: 375
Youth, hot and furious, cannot brook delay,
By flattering vice is eas'ly led away;
Vain in discourse, inconstant in desire,
In censure, rash; in pleasures, all on fire.
The Manly Age does steadier thoughts enjoy; 380
Pow'r, and ambition do his soul employ:
Against the turns of fate he sets his mind;
And by the past the future hopes to find.
Decrepit Age, still adding to his stores,
For others heaps the treasure he adores. 385
In all his actions keeps a frozen pace;
Past times extols, the present to debase:
Incapable of pleasures youth abuse,
In others blames, what age does him refuse.
Your actors must by reason be control'd; 390
Let young men speak like young, old men like old:
Observe the Town, and study well the Court;
For thither various characters resort;
Thus 'twas great Johnson purchas'd his renown,
And in his art had born away the crown; 395
If less desirous of the peoples praise,
He had not with low farce debas'd his plays;
Mixing dull buffoonry with wit refin'd,
And Harlequin with noble Terence join'd.
When in the Fox I see the tortoise hiss, 400
I lose the author of the Alchymist.

The Comic Wit, born with a smiling air,
 Must Tragic grief, and pompous verse forbear;
 Yet may he not, as on a market-place,
 With bawdy jests amuse the populace : 415
 With well-bred conversation you must please,
 And your intrigue unravel'd be with ease :
 Your action still should reason's rules obey,
 Nor in an empty scene may lose its way.
 Your humble stile must sometimes gently rise ; 418
 And your discourse sententious be, and wise :
 The passions must to nature be confin'd,
 And scenes to scenes with artful weaving join'd :
 Your wit must not unseasonably play ;
 But follow bus'ness, never lead the way. 419
 Observe how Terence does this error shun ;
 A careful father chides his am'rous son :
 Then see that son, whom no advice can move,
 Forget those orders, and pursue his love :
 'Tis not a well-drawn picture we discover ; 420
 'Tis a true son, a father, and a lover.
 I like an author that reforms the age ;
 And keeps the right decorum of the stage,
 That always pleases by just reason's rule :
 But for a tedious droll, a quibbling fool, 425
 Who with low, nauseous bawdry fills his plays ;
 Let him begone, and on two tressels raise
 Some Smithfield stage, where he may act his pranks,
 And make Jack Puddings speak to mountebanks.

CANTO IV.

IN Florence dwelt a doctor of renown,
 The scourge of God, and terror of the town,
 Who all the cant of physick had by heart,
 And never murder'd but by rules of art.
 The public mischief was his private gain;
 Children their slaughter'd parents sought in vain:
 A brother here his poison'd brother wept;
 Some bloodless dy'd, and some by opium slept.
 Colds, at his presence, would to frenzies turn;
 And agues, like malignant fevers, burn.
 Hated, at last, his practice gives him o'er:
 One friend, unkill'd by drugs, of all his store,
 In his new country-house affords him place,
 'Twas a rich abbot, and a building afs:
 Here first the doctor's talent came in play,
 He seems inspir'd, and talks like * Wren or May:
 Of this new portico condemns the face,
 And turns the entrance to a better place;
 Designs the stair-case at the other end.
 His friend approves, does for his mason send,
 He comes; the doctor's arguments prevail.
 In short, to finish this our hum'rous tale,
 He Galen's dang'rous science does reject,
 And from ill doctor turns good architect.

* The king's architects.

In this example we may have our part: 25
 Rather be mason, ('tis an useful art!)
 Than a dull poet; for that trade accurst,
 Admits no mean betwixt the best and worst.
 In other sciences, without disgrace
 A candidate may fill a second place; 30
 But poetry no medium can admit,
 No reader suffers an indiff'rent wit:
 The ruin'd stationers against him bawl,
 And Herringman degrades him from his stall.
 Burlesque, at least our laughter may excite; 35
 But a cold writer never can delight.
 The Counter-Scuffle has more wit and art,
 Than the stiff formal stile of Gondibert.
 Be not affected with that empty praise
 Which your vain flatterers will sometimes raise, 40
 And when you read, with ecstasie will say,
 "The finish'd piece! the admirable play!"
 Which when expos'd to censure and to light,
 Cannot indure a critic's piercing sight.
 A hundred authors fates have been foretold, 45
 And Sh---le's works are printed, but not sold.
 Hear all the world; consider every thought;
 A fool by chance may stumble on a fault:
 Yet, when Apollo does your muse inspire,
 Be not impatient to expose your fire; 50
 Nor imitate the Settles of our times,
 Those tuneful readers of their own dull rhymes,

Who seize on all th' acquaintance they can meet,
 And stop the passengers that walk the street;
 There is no sanctuary you can chuse 55
 For a defence from their pursuing muse.
 I've said before, be patient when they blame;
 To alter for the better is no shame.
 Yet yield not to a fool's impertinence:
 Sometimes conceited sceptics void of sense, 60
 By their false taste condemn some finish'd part,
 And blame the noblest flights of wit and art.
 In vain their fond opinions you deride,
 With their lov'd follies they are satisfy'd;
 And their weak judgment, void of sense and light, 65
 Thinks nothing can escape their feeble sight:
 Their dang'rous counsels do not cure, but wound;
 To shun the storm, they run your verse aground, }
 And thinking to escape a rock, are drown'd. }
 Chuse a sure judge to censure what you write, 70
 Whose reason leads, and knowledge gives you light,
 Whose steady hand will prove your faithful guide,
 And touch the darling follies you would hide:
 He, in your doubts, will carefully advise,
 And clear the mist before your feeble eyes, 75
 'Tis he will tell you, to what noble height
 A generous muse may sometimes take her flight;
 When, too much fetter'd with the rules of art,
 May from her stricter bounds and limits part:
 But such a perfect judge is hard to see, 80
 And every rhymers knows not poetry;

OF POETRY.

39

Nay some there are, for writing verse extol'd,
Who know not Lucan's dross from Virgil's gold.

Would you in this great art acquire renown :

Authors, observe the rules I here lay down.

35

In prudent lessons every where abound ;

With pleasant, join the useful and the sound .

A sober reader, a vain tale will slight ;

He seeks as well instruction, as delight.

Let all your thoughts to virtue be confin'd,

30

Still off'ring noble figures to our mind :

I like not those loose writers who employ

Their guilty muse, good manners to destroy ;

Who with false colours still deceive our eyes,

And show us vice dress'd in a fair disguise.

25

Yet do I not their sullen muse approve

Who from all modest writings banish love ;

That strip the play-house of its chief intrigue,

And make a murderer of Roderigue :

* The lightest love, if decently exprest,

100

Will raise no vitious motions in our breast.

Dido in vain may weep, and ask relief ;

I blame her folly, whilst I share her grief.

A virtuous author, in his charming art,

To please the sense needs not corrupt the heart ;

105

His heat will never cause a guilty fire :

To follow virtue then be your desire.

* The Cid, translated into English.

In vain your art and vigour are exprest;
Th'obscene expression shows th' infected breast.
But above all, base jealousies avoid,
In which detracting poets are employ'd :
A noble wit dares lib'rally commend;
And scorns to grudge at his deserving friend.
Base rivals, who true wit and merit hate,
Caballing still against it with the great,
Maliciously aspire to gain renown
By standing up, and pulling others down.
Never debase yourself by treacherous ways,
Nor by such abject methods seek for praise :
Let not your only bus'ness be to write ;
Be virtuous, just, and in your friends delight.
'Tis not enough your poems be admir'd ;
But strive your conversation be desir'd :
Write for immortal fame ; nor ever chuse
Gold for the object of a gen'rous muse.
I know a noble wit may, without crime,
Receive a lawful tribute for his time :
Yet I abhor those writers, who despise
Their honour ; and alone their profit prize :
Who their Apollo basely will degrade,
And of a noble science, make a trade.
Before kind reason did her light display,
And government taught mortals to obey,
Men, like wild beasts, did nature's laws pursue,
They fed on herbs, and drink from rivers drew ;

Their brutal force, on lust and rapine bent,
 Committed murders without punishment:
 Reason at last, by her all-conquering arts,
 Reduc'd these savages, and tun'd their hearts;
 Mankind from bogs, and woods, and caverns calls, 140
 And towns and cities fortifies with walls:
 Thus fear of justice made proud rapine cease,
 And shelter'd innocence by laws and peace.

These benefits from poets we receiv'd,
 From whence are rais'd those fictions since believ'd, 145
 That Orpheus, by his soft harmonious strains
 Tam'd the fierce tygers of the Thracian plains;
 Amphion's notes, by their melodious pow'rs,
 Drew rocks and woods, and rais'd the Theban tow'rs:
 These miracles from numbers did arise, 150
 Since which, in verse Heav'n taught his mysteries,
 And by a priest, possess'd with rage divine,
 Apollo spoke from his prophetic shrine.
 Soon after Homer the old heroes prais'd,
 And noble minds by great examples rais'd; 155
 Then Hesiod did his Grecian swains incline
 To till the fields, and prune the bounteous vine.
 Thus useful rules were by the poet's aid,
 In easy numbers, to rude men convey'd,
 And pleasingly their precepts did impart; 160
 First charm'd the ear, and then engag'd the heart:
 The muses thus their reputation rais'd,
 And with just gratitude in Greece were prais'd.

With pleasure mortals did their wonders see,
 And sacrific'd to their divinity :
 But want, at last base flatt'ry entertain'd,
 And old Parnassus with this vice was slain'd;
 Desire of gain dazling the poets eyes,
 Their works were fill'd with fulsome flatteries,
 Thus needy wits a vile revenue made,
 And verse became a mercenary trade.
 Debase not with so mean a vice thy art :
 If gold must be the idol of thy heart,
 Fly, fly th' unfruitful Heliconian strand,
 Those streams are not enrich'd with golden sand :
 Great wits, as well as warriors, only gain
 Laurels and honours for their toil and pain :
 But, what ? an author cannot live on fame,
 Or pay a reck'ning with a lofty name :
 A poet to whom fortune is unkind,
 Who when he goes to bed has hardly din'd ;
 Takes little pleasure in Parnassus' dreams,
 Or relishes the Heliconian streams.
 Horace had ease and plenty when he writ,
 And free from cares for money or for meat,
 Did not expect his dinner from his wit.
 'Tis true; but verse is cherish'd by the great,
 And now none famish who deserve to eat :
 What can we fear, when virtue, arts, and sense,
 Receive the stars propitious influence ;

165

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} 185

190

When a sharp-lighted prince, by early grants
 Rewards your merits, and prevents your wants ?
 Sing then his glory, celebrate his fame ;
 Your noblest theme is his immortal name.
 Let mighty Spencer raise his reverend head, 195
 Cowley and Denham start up from the dead ;
 Waller his age renew, and off' rings bring, 170
 Our monarch's praise let bright-ey'd virgins sing ;
 Let Dryden with new rules our stage refine,
 And his great models form by this design : 200
 But where's a second Virgil to rehearse
 Our hero's glories in his Epic verse ? 175
 What Orpheus sing his triumphs o'er the main,
 And make the hills and forests move again ;
 Show his bold fleet on the Batavian shore, 205
 And Holland trembling as his cannons roar ;
 Paint Europe's balance in his steady hand, 180
 Whilst the two worlds in expectation stand
 Of peace or war, that wait on his command ? }
 But, as I speak, new glories strike my eyes, 210
 Glories, which Heav'n itself does give, and prize,
 Blessings of peace ; that with their milder rays 195
 Adorn his reign, and bring Saturnian days :
 Now let rebellion, discord, vice, and rage,
 That have in patriots forms debauch'd our age, 215
 Vanish, with all the ministers of hell ;
 His rays their pois'nous vapours shall dispel : 190

44 THE ART OF POETRY.

'Tis he alone our safety did create,
 His own firm soul secur'd the nations fate,
 Oppos'd to all the BOUTREVS of the state. } 110
 Authors, for him your great endeavours raise;
 The loftiest numbers will but reach his praise.
 For me, whose verse in Satyr has been bred,
 And never durst Heroic measures tread;
 Yet you shall see me, in that famous field 215
 With eyes and voice my best assistance yield;
 Offer you lessons, that my infant muse
 Learnt, when she Horace for her guide did chuse:
 Second your zeal with wishes, heart, and eyes,
 And afar off hold up the glorious prize. 230
 But pardon too, if, zealous for the right,
 A strict observer of each noble flight,
 From the fine gold I separate th' allay,
 And show how hasty writers sometimes stray:
 Apt to blame, than knowing how to mend; 235
 A sharp, but yet a necessary friend.

F I N I S.

110

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135